DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 804 SP 014 623

AUTHOR Long, James D.
TITLE Managing Classroom Problems.
NOTE 23p.: For related document, see SP 014 622.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Problems; *Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; *Creative Teaching; Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Locus of Control; Professional Recognition; *Self Control; Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Morale; Teaching Conditions

ABSTRACT

Schools need to meet unique problems through the development of special classroom management techniques. Factors which contribute to classroom problems include lack of supervision at home, broken homes, economic deprivation, and a desire for peer attention. The educational atmosphere should encourage creativity for both the student and the teacher. Teachers should not merely react to the environment as good or bad but operate on the environment to change it. Teachers often rely too heavily on reinforcement or feedback from the environment and should exercise self control and self management. Teachers need to exercise greater control in manipulating the consequences of their own behavior. Personal relationships are reciprocal, and, when positive reinforcement is given, positive feedback is likely to result. Another method by which teachers might cope with work-related problems is to cultivate social and athletic interests outside of school. Inservice programs can assist teachers in the development of self-management strategies. (JN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
James D. Long
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED196804

Managing Classroom Problems

James D. Long
Appalachian State University

To this point we have been talking primarily about problems in teaching in North Carolina and how teacher preparation programs there can be more responsive to teacher needs. You may be thinking that the type of problems experienced in North Carolina aren't the kind of problems experienced in Virginia or in D. C. Undoubtedly all the problems are not the same. Each school has problems unique to its setting and to the persons who make up the school. However, it really is not the presence of problems that differentiates one school from another. All schools, at least to some degree, experience problems, although those problems may vary from school to school. What really differs between the schools is what the schools do to manage their problems. Schools certainly don't improve circumstances by shifting blame to others. In our survey, lack of supervision at home, broken homes, economic deprivation, and a desire for peer attention were repeatedly cited as the contributory factors for the discipline problems faced by teachers. Surely, no one would deny that a student's home life, his community, and friends contribute to his behavior at school. But to contend that the home, community, and friends are the causes of problems is an environmentalist position. When a teacher or administrator makes this argument, he/she must realize that the school, too, is a part of the student's environment. Acceptance of one's own influence would then seem to be a fundamental prerequisite to producing lasting change. If a child lacks interests in the school, can the school do nothing to remedy

SP 014 623

that circumstance? Surely, the school can do little if the home or community is held responsible for all student actions. Teachers and administrators alike must stand ready to ask, "In what ways have we contributed to problems?" "What can we do to produce change?"

Several options are available for helping school personnel improve the schools. First, teachers can work for changes in the educational system itself. A basic assumption in this approach is that school personnel become products of the environment to which they are exposed. For example, a school system that solicits teacher ideas will cultivate the intellectual growth of its teachers. Conversely, a setting where teachers are told, "We don't do things that way around here" will stiffle creativity. The attempts of professional education associations, teachers' unions, PTAs, and community action groups to improve the working conditions of teachers and to give teachers more voice in school affairs are predicated on the belief that the teaching-learning process will improve once the conditions in the schools improve.

There is considerable merit in everyone working to create a more favorable school environment. Teachers and administrators should definitely be at the forefront of such activities. However, an approach that can serve as an alternative to, or be used in conjunction with, attempts to change the system is for teachers to work for self-change. This is not to say that teachers should adjust themselves to unreasonable school environments. Quite the contrary. This approach simply means that teachers should consider how their own behaviors influence the environment. Teachers do not merely react to the environment and become good or bad teachers as a function of that environment. They also operate on the environment. Part of the way in

which others respond to teachers is the result of how teachers behave. In other words, teachers bring something to the situation. If teachers (and other school personnel) can learn to analyze and control the factors that will sustain them in applying what they have learned, they may be able to produce needed changes in the schools and in themselves.

If you agree that teachers ought to direct at least part of their attention towards changing themselves, then, the question of how self-change can be achieved becomes important. There are any number of strategies for moving towards greater self-control. In fact, a recent review of self-help manuals in the Psychological Bulletin uncovered over 75 self-help books published in a five year period. Although many of these works might be of dubious value, teachers have yet to tap the worthwhile resources that are available. While we don't have time to discuss all the potential approaches for self-control, I would like to focus briefly on one major issue that recieved attention in our survey--what the teachers deemed to be most reinforcing and punishing in teaching.

The data on what the teachers identified as being reinforcing about teaching indicate a strong reliance on others for reinforcement. Such responses as seeing a child write her name, having a student return to school years later to say "Thanks," and being around young people depend exclusively on the behavior of others. Certainly, teachers can influence how others feel--that's a big part of self-management. But leaving others to initiate desired action is what I believe to be the major cause of disillusionment with teaching. Most behavior is governed by what happens following the behavior. It is, therefore, the consequences of behavior that maintain human actions. Consequences which strengthen

behavior (make themmore likely to occur) are called reinforcers and consequences which weaken are called punishers. A "Thank you" from a parent or student, recognition from a professional group, or a smile from the principal typically are reinforcing, while criticism, sarcasm, and blame are punishing for most teachers. Consider how these effect teachers. Suppose a teacher has been up half the night planning a lesson and the next day no one seems interested. Lack of interest and being taken for granted can be a major deterent to doing hard work in the future. Similarly, suppose a teacher is nice but the student to whom such attention is directed is sarcastic. How long will the teacher continue being nice? An erosion of positive behavior can be the direct result of simply waiting for or expecting others to provide rewards.

My point is that teachers must take a greater role in manipulating the consequences for their own behaviors. If being prepared for class, offering praise to others, being receptive to new ideas, working out strategies to prevent problems, and so on are to be maintained, teachers must insure that reinforcers follow these behaviors. Conversely, teachers need to insure that reinforcers do not follow unwanted actions. The teacher who complains about his problems to an agreeing colleague can rest assured that complaining will be more likely in the future. In other words, what is good or bad about teaching is subject to control.

If teachers are to use consequences effectively, they must first identify those consequences that they deem most important. It matters not that the consequences might be rewarding or punishing to others. Surely, there are other reinforcers in teaching besides student progress and gratitude. A short break following a lesson preparation might be a

consequence that sustains lesson planning. But the teacher is the one who has to determine what really is working for him/her.

Once a teacher has identified consequences that are meaningful, he/she is in a position to use the consequences in controlling his/her behavior. The process is a simple one--require the specific behavior to be exhibited before a reinforcer is delivered. If a teacher finds feedback from the administration to be reinforcing, she should seek administrative input, say, following a well planned lesson. Waiting for someone to say, "You've done a good job" could be nonproductive. Teachers can and should arrange circumstances so that proper reinforcers are forthcoming. If a teacher finds student compliments reinforcing, she should insure that she receives an abundance of approval. Of course, one way to increase positive statements received would be to increase the number of positive statements given. There is a reciprocal relationship between how we behave towards others and how they behave towards us.

One of the problems in relying principally upon student progress as a source of reinforcement is the variability with which students progress. The teacher may have to wait until a standardized test before progress can be accurately noted. Some progress may not be noticeable for years. The number of teachers in our survey who commented on student apathy and problems with motivation suggest that some students make minimal academic progress. Wherein, then, lies the payoff for the teacher? Will the teacher who depends on student progress as a payoff keep doing good work with minimal evidence of student progress? We think not. Teachers, therefore, need to think in terms of daily reinforcement for themselves. Like their students, teachers are not apt to work for an improbable, remote reward.

Another tactic that can assist teachers in managing their lives and in coping with the problems we have been discussing from our survey lies in cultivating interests in activities outside of school. Many teachers report that having interest outside of school facilitates developing and maintaining positive attitudes. We have found in our own lives that we are most productive and agreeable when looking forward to a game of tennis or a night on the town. After engaging in enjoyable events, we seem to appreciate our work and other persons even more. If you look around at persons who respond most positively to others, you will probably find that these persons engage in many different happiness-producing activities.

Don't misunderstand. I am not saying that work is an unenjoyable experience. Most of us derive much satisfaction from our work. But most people need outlets from the occasional frustrations of their work. A teacher who relies solely on students and colleagues for friendship may feel resentful if the students and colleagues fail to be totally committed to the relationship. Our belief is that one should not rely upon work for every satisfaction. Teachers should identify activities that are enjoyable and establish a time for engaging in those activities.

Surely, manipulating the reinforcements available in teaching is no panacea. There are obstacles in any approach. But taking the initiative to control what happens following the execution of a desired behavior is essential if that behavior is to be maintained. Universities can assist teachers in developing strategies and in improving teacher behaviors. It remains, however, for the teachers to execute those behaviors and to insure that the behaviors remain intact when the going gets rough.

TABLE 1

Perceived Problems in Teaching

Problem	Type School			Experience		Sex		Location			
	K-6 (92)*	7-8 (63)	9-12 (75)	0-5 (65)	6-up (165)	M (64)	F (166)	City +10,000 (49)	City -10,000 (74)	Subs (50)	Rural (57)
Discipline	25.0	23.8	12.0	13.8	23.0	21.0	20.5	18.4	23.0	20.0	19.3
(General)	14.1	9.5	4.0	9.2	9.7	8.1	10.2	10.2	6.8	14.0	8.8
	4.3	1.6	10.7	6.2	5.5	9.7	4.2	4.1	2.7	12.0	5.3
Specific Discipline: Motivation	9.8	15.9	20.0	10.8	16.4	14.5	15.1	14.3	17.6	14.0	12.3
	4.3	20.6	22.7	10.8	16.4	25.8	10.8	10.2	13.5	14.0	21.1
	6.5	7.9	13.3	6.2	10.3	8.1	9.6	4.1	6.8	14.0	12.3
Lack of Respect for Teachers	6.5	9.5	8.0	15.4	4.8	8.1	7.2	10.2	5.4	8.0	8.8
	3.3	9.5	2.7	7.7	3.6	4.8	4.8	0	10.8	0	5.3
	3.3	6.3	4.0	3.1	4.8	6.5	3.0	4.1	2.7	6.0	5.3
Disruptive Behavior	2.2	0	1.3	3.1	.6	1.6	1.2	2.0	1.4	0	1.8
	2.2	4.8	1.3	3.1	2.4	1.6	3.0	2.0	4.1	4.0	0
	1.1	6.3	0	4.6	1.2	3.2	1.8	4.1	2.7	0	1.8
Truancy/Tardiness	0	1.6	4.0	1.5	1.8	1.6	1.8	0	1.4	2.0	3.5
	0	0	1.3	0	.6	0	.6	0	0	2.0	0
	0	3.2	6.7	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.0	2	5.4	2.0	1.8
Individual Differences/	9.8	12.7	6.7	10.8	9.1	4.8	10.8	8.2	10.8	6.0	12.3
Mainstreaming	20.7	7.9	6.7	15.4	11.5	6.5	14.5	16.3	9.5	10.0	15.8
	8.7	4.8	5.3	7.7	6.1	6.5	6.6	10.2	5.4	8.0	3.5
Lack of Planning Time	9.8	6.3	8.0	7.7	8.5	6.5	9.0	10.2	6.8	8.0	8.8
	10.9	12.7	10.7	7.7	12.7	8.1	12.7	14.3	10.8	8.0	12.3
	17.4	14.3	10.7	15.4	13.9	12.9	15.1	14.3	18.9	10.0	12.3
Classes Too Large	13.0	3.2	6.7	9.2	7.9	8.1	8.4	10.2	8.1	8.0	7.0
	7.6	4.8	1.3	6.2	4.2	6.5	4.2	0	4.1	8.0	7.0
	5.4	3.2	0	4.6	2.4	1.6	3.6	4.1	1.4	2.0	5.3

*Number responding

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Problem	K-6	7-8	9-12	0-5	6-up	M	F	Location: City +10,000	City -10,000	Subs	Rural
Lack of Parent Support	13.0	6.3	5.3	12.3	7.3	16.1	6.0	8.2	9.5	16.0	1.8
	7.6	1.6	6.7	7.7	4.8	6.5	5.4	4.1	5.4	4.0	8.8
	9.8	9.5	4.0	6.2	8.5	8.1	7.8	2.0	9.5	4.0	14.0
Inadequate Materials	3.3	4.8	5.3	4.6	4.2	6.5	3.6	2.0	2.7	0	12.3
	8.7	3.2	9.3	9.2	6.7	4.8	8.4	4.1	4.1	10.0	12.3
	6.5	6.3	8.0	7.7	6.7	3.2	7.8	10.2	4.1	4.0	10.5
Poor Administration	0	3.2	4.0	1.5	2.4	4.8	1.2	4.1	2.7	2.0	0
	2.2	1.6	8.0	4.6	3.6	6.5	3.0	4.1	5.4	6.0	0
	7.6	6.3	8.0	10.8	6.1	3.2	9.0	14.3	5.4	4.0	7.0
Eroding Social Standards	2.2	4.8	10.7	3.1	6.7	1.6	7.2	4.1	6.8	8.0	3.5
	9.8	11.1	14.7	9.2	12.7	8.1	12.7	12.2	16.2	12.0	5.3
	5.4	6.3	9.3	6.2	7.3	8.1	6.6	2.0	14.9	4.0	3.5
Inept Teachers	4.3	4.8	5.3	3.1	5.5	3.2	5.4	8.2	2.7	2.0	7.0
	3.3	4.8	5.3	4.6	4.2	6.5	3.6	10.2	5.4	0	1.8
	4.3	1.6	5.3	6.2	3.0	4.8	3.6	4.1	1.4	6.0	5.3

TABLE 2

Causes of Problems in Teaching

Causes	Type School			Experience		Sex		Location			
	K-6	7-8	9-12	0-5	6-up	M	F	City +10,000	City -10,000	Subs	Rural
Home Environment	40.2	38.1	29.3	38.5	35.2	32.3	37.3	32.7	35.1	40.0	36.8
	22.8	27.0	18.7	29.2	20.0	25.8	21.1	22.4	24.3	26.0	17.5
	16.3	15.9	20.0	12.3	19.4	24.2	15.1	10.2	12.2	22.0	26.3
Government Interference	6.5	9.5	5.3	7.7	6.7	9.7	6.0	10.2	5.4	12.0	1.8
	6.5	4.8	10.7	0	10.3	12.9	5.4	16.3	2.7	12.0	1.8
	9.8	9.5	4.0	7.7	7.9	4.8	9.0	12.2	4.1	6.0	10.5
Poor Administration	6.5	14.3	9.3	7.7	10.3	14.5	7.8	16.3	5.4	10.0	8.8
	7.6	14.3	13.3	12.3	10.9	12.9	10.8	12.2	8.1	8.0	17.5
	6.5	9.5	9.3	10.8	7.3	9.7	7.8	12.2	8.1	2.0	10.5
Social Promotion	7.6	12.7	14.7	9.2	12.1	8.1	12.7	4.1	14.9	14.0	10.5
	6.5	9.5	16.0	9.2	10.9	4.8	12.0	10.2	14.9	6.0	8.8
	5.4	14.3	6.7	12.3	6.7	6.5	8.4	10.2	9.5	4.0	8.8
Inadequate Funds, Materials	8.7	4.8	13.3	10.8	8.5	12.9	7.8	6.1	10.8	6.0	12.3
	16.3	7.9	9.3	16.9	9.7	4.8	14.5	4.1	13.5	12.0	15.8
	14.1	6.3	13.3	12.3	11.5	9.7	12.0	10.2	12.2	12.0	12.3
Poor Working Conditions	6.5	2.2	4.0	6.2	4.2	1.6	6.0	4.1	5.4	2.0	7.0
	4.3	6.3	4.0	4.6	4.8	3.2	5.4	8.2	6.8	2.0	1.8
	3.3	3.2	5.3	6.2	3.0	4.8	3.6	2.0	4.1	4.0	5.3
Student Lack of Interest	2.2	3.2	4.0	0	4.2	1.6	3.6	2.0	2.7	0	7.0
	0	3.2	6.7	1.5	3.6	4.8	2.4	2.0	4.1	4.0	1.8
	0	0	4.0	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.2	0	1.4	4.0	0
Poor Teacher Preparation	7.6	3.2	4.0	9.2	3.6	4.8	5.4	8.2	4.1	2.0	7.0
	9.8	4.8	4.0	7.7	6.1	4.8	7.2	8.2	8.1	2.0	7.0
	7.6	4.8	5.3	7.7	5.5	6.5	6.0	14.3	5.4	2.0	3.5
Clerical Duties	3.3	1.6	0.0	0	2.4	1.6	1.2	2.0	2.7	0	1.8
	3.3	3.2	0.0	0	3.0	3.2	1.8	2.0	4.1	2.0	0
	1.1	0	4.0	1.5	1.8	1.6	1.8	0	1.4	6.0	0

TABLE 2 (continued)

Causes	K-6	7-8	9-12	0-5	6-up	M	F	City +10,000	City -10,000	Subs	Rural
Changing Social Values	1.1	1.6	2.7	1.5	1.8	1.6	1.8	0	4.1	0	1.8
	0	3.2	4.0	1.5	2.4	1.6	2.4	0	1.4	2.0	5.3
	2.2	4.8	9.3	3.1	6.1	4.8	5.4	4.1	8.1	6.0	1.8
TV	2.2	0.0	0.0	1.5	.6	0	1.2	0	1.4	2.0	0
	2.2	4.8	0.0	0	3.0	4.8	1.2	0	1.4	2.0	5.3
	2.2	3.2	1.3	0	3.0	3.2	1.8	0	4.1	4.0	0
Inadequate Salaries	0.0	0.0	1.3	0	.6	0	.6	2.0	0	0	0
	1.1	0.0	1.3	0	1.2	1.6	.6	2.0	0	2.0	0
	2.2	1.6	0	3.1	.6	1.6	1.2	2.0	1.4	0	1.8

TABLE 3

Needs in Teacher Education Preparation Programs

Needs	K-6	7-8	9-12	0-5	6-up	M	F	Location 1	2	3	4
Earlier, Practical Experiences	26.1 10.9	17.5 7.9	24.0 12.0	21.5 13.8	23.6 9.1	14.5 14.5	26.5 9.0	30.6 12.2	24.3 10.8	16.0 6.0	21.1 12.3
Emphasis on Discipline	23.9 9.8	28.6 11.1	28.0 8.0	26.2 9.2	26.7 9.7	25.8 4.8	27.1 11.4	24.5 12.2	25.7 8.1	26.0 12.0	29.8 7.0
Emphasis on Teaching Reading	10.9 8.7	7.9 4.8	6.7 10.7	7.7 7.7	9.1 8.5	8.1 9.7	9.0 7.8	6.1 12.2	10.8 4.1	4.0 10.0	12.3 8.8
Emphasis on Teaching Exceptional Students	8.7 6.5	9.5 4.8	4.0 4.0	13.8 7.7	4.8 4.2	6.5 3.2	7.2 6.0	12.2 6.1	6.8 5.4	8.0 6.0	3.5 3.5
Management of Non-Teaching Tasks	9.8 9.8	6.3 7.9	6.7 8.0	12.3 6.2	6.1 9.7	9.7 4.8	7.2 9.6	8.2 10.2	8.1 10.8	4.0 4.0	10.5 8.8
Human Relations Skills	6.5 5.4	6.3 6.3	6.7 2.7	4.6 7.7	7.3 3.6	9.7 3.2	5.4 5.4	6.1 4.1	5.4 5.4	10.0 4.0	5.3 5.3
Developing Methods, Materials	4.3 4.3	3.2 3.2	4.0 6.7	1.5 6.2	4.8 4.2	6.5 1.6	3.0 6.0	6.1 8.2	2.7 2.7	2.0 2.0	5.3 7.0
More Specialized Courses	3.3 4.3	7.9 11.1	9.3 5.3	4.6 9.2	7.3 5.5	8.1 11.3	5.4 4.8	4.1 6.1	5.4 5.4	14.0 4.0	3.5 9.6
Individual Differences	3.3 6.5	6.3 4.8	1.3 2.7	1.5 6.2	4.2 4.2	0 3.2	4.8 5.4	2.0 0	4.1 4.1	6.0 10.0	1.8 5.3
Math Skills	0 1.1	1.6 0	1.3 1.3	0 1.5	1.2 .6	0 0	1.2 1.2	0 0	2.7 1.4	0 0	0 1.8

TABLE 4

Most Rewarding Aspects of Teaching

Rewards	K-6	7-8	9-12	0-5	6-up	M	F	Location 1	2	3	4
Student Progress	81.5	69.8	70.7	73.8	75.2	58.1	81.3	75.5	71.6	68.0	84.2
Appreciation from Students & Parents	9.8	17.5	16.0	7.7	16.4	27.4	9.0	14.3	12.2	22.0	8.8
Working with Young People	3.3	7.9	8.0	10.8	4.2	6.5	5.4	8.2	9.5	0	5.3
Freedom	2.2	0	0	1.5	.6	1.6	.6	0	1.4	2.0	0

TABLE 5

Least Rewarding Aspects of Teaching

Disadvantages	K-6	7-8	9-12	0-5	6-up	M	F	Location 1	2	3	4
Working Conditions	12.0	17.5	14.7	12.3	15.2	24.2	10.8	18.4	12.2	14.0	14.0
Apathy of Students	20.7	30.2	32.0	27.7	26.7	27.4	27.1	24.5	29.7	18.0	33.3
Lack of Parental Support	26.1	19.0	10.7	20.0	18.8	12.9	21.1	16.3	21.3	24.0	15.8
Paper Work	23.9	11.1	28.0	16.9	23.6	9.7	25.9	28.6	14.9	20.0	26.3
Students Not Attaining Potential	7.6	15.9	8.0	10.8	9.7	12.9	9.0	8.2	12.2	16	3.5

TABLE 6

Would You Choose Teaching Again?

Choice	K-6	7-8	9-12	0-5	6-up	M	F	Location 1	2	3	4
Yes	66.3	55.6	58.7	58.5	61.8	43.5	67.5	65.3	60.8	46.0	70
No	18.5	31.7	29.3	27.7	24.8	35.5	21.7	20.4	29.7	32.0	19
Maybe	13.0	11.1	6.7	9.2	10.9	14.5	9.0	14.3	5.4	16.0	8